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Copy No. 3

29 November 1965

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Political Problems Involved in Operating OXCART Missions from Okinawa over Communist China and North Vietnam

Communist Reactions

1. China. We believe that the Chinese would quickly acquire knowledge of the operation. Mission aircraft would almost certainly be detected by Chinese radar and, by virtue of speed and altitude, be identified as a new type of reconnaissance vehicle. The chances are good that Chinese agents on Okinawa would become aware of the operation and that Peiping would quickly relate the new overflights to the base at Kadena.

2. The Chinese would of course try to knock down the aircraft. Assuming their failure to do so, and a successful flight, we believe the chances of significantly adverse consequences to the US are virtually negligible. For the reasons that they do not acknowledge successful U-2 overflights, they would almost certainly

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not draw any special attention to this operation. Furthermore, in this contingency the kind of pressure they might try to apply to Japan or to any other country which might have afforded assistance would be of the most general sort -- if any at all.

3. The situation would be quite different, of course, if an OXCART aircraft came down on Chinese territory. Such an incident would be the occasion for a major political and propaganda campaign, particularly if a live American pilot fell into Chinese hands. In dramatizing the affair, Peiping would hope to persuade the world, including the American public, of Chinese strength and of the riskiness of US policy. They would also use what resources they had to mobilize public opinion in Japan and in Okinawa against US control of the latter island and against the existence of US bases in Japan itself.

4. We do not believe that OXCART missions, whether or not any aircraft came down inside China, would significantly affect Peiping's broader calculations governing its policy toward the war in Vietnam.

5. North Vietnam. The DRV is already subjected to heavy US air attack and reconnaissance. It would attach little extra significance to the OXCART operation.

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6. The USSR. Through a variety of its own sources

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the Soviets would quickly acquire a fairly complete picture of the operation. They would probably take no action and make no representations on the matter. Moscow would reinforce any Chinese or North Vietnamese propaganda campaigns built around the shoot-down of an aircraft. But almost certainly they would not make overflights of China or the DRV a major issue in Soviet-US relations. Their primary concern would be to forestall use of the aircraft over their own territory. To this end they would probably issue propaganda recalling the inglorious end of the U-2 program over the USSR, and warning of the dangers of retribution against cooperating countries. They might further make private communications to the US stressing the seriousness with which they would view any intrusions into Soviet airspace.

Reactions in Cooperating Countries

7. Japan poses the major problem. If the Chinese publicized overflights which used Okinawan facilities, there would be trouble

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in Japan for the Sato government and the US. If the Chinese recovered an aircraft and pilot, there would be a great deal of trouble. Under normal circumstances, Sato could probably weather the storm. But if the Japanese public's anxieties over Vietnam had meanwhile become more acute, the incident might enable the leftists to inflict serious damage on the government.

8. In the event of troubles of this kind, the Japanese government would probably attempt to dissociate itself publicly from the US operation. Indeed, the government might prefer not to have detailed information in advance of the operation, so that it could more easily disclaim responsibility later. Whatever the degree of its information, however, we believe that the Sato government would not in fact attempt serious interference with the operation unless public demonstrations following a shootdown reached an extreme which actually threatened to force its resignation.

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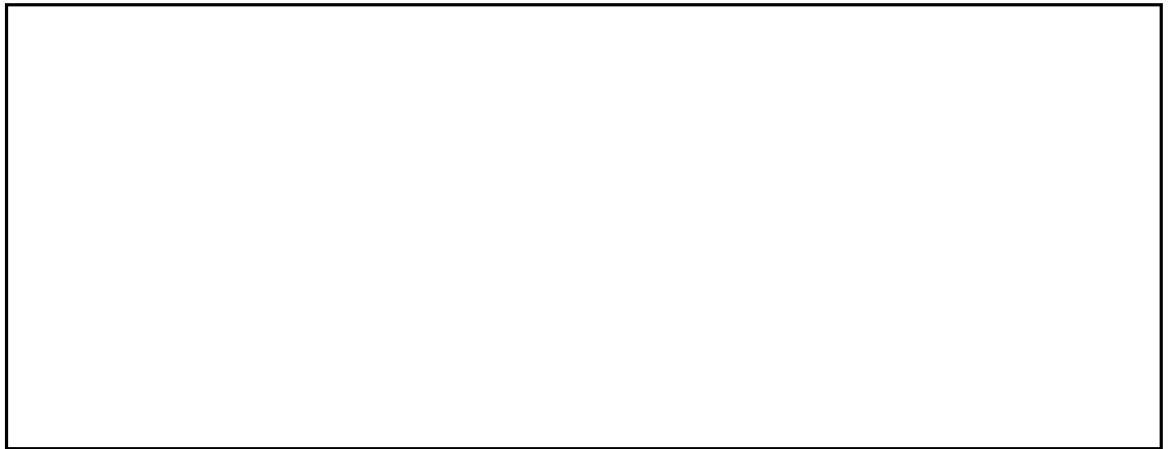
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